
Dr. CHAUNCY'S
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED at the FIRST CHURCH

I N

B O S T O N,

M A R C H 13th, 1785.

27



A-
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED at the FIRST CHURCH

I N

B O S T O N,

M A R C H 13th, 1785 :

OCCASIONED BY THE RETURN OF THE SOCIETY

TO THEIR

HOUSE of WORSHIP,

AFTER LONG ABSENCE,

TO MAKE WAY FOR THE REPAIRS THAT WERE

N E C E S S A R Y.

By CHA^TLES CHAUNCEY, D.D.

And FELLOW of the AMERICAN ACADEMY of

ARTS and SCIENCES, established in the COM-

MONWEALTH of MASSACHUSETTS.

B O S T O N,

Printed by GREENLEAF and FREEMAN, North side the

MARKET, M,DCC,LXXXV.



A

S E R M O N.

I. K I N G S, viii, 27.

But will God in very deed dwell on earth? Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have built?

THE Jewish nation were now assembled at Jerusalem, to devote the Temple they had built there to an observance of the public services of piety; and king Solomon, in their name, and as their mouth, adores that glorious being, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, humbly supplicating that he would graciously condescend to hearken to the cry of his people when they should pray to him in this house: in imitation of so pious an example, let us, upon our return to our house of worship, after long absence, to make way for its being so repaired as to be comfortable and convenient; let us, I say, make it our prayer, that the God who dwelleth on high would hearken to our supplications when we pray
in

in this place, and that his ears may be open, both night and day, to hear in heaven, and do for us according to the greatness of his mercy in Christ. And, as we are now assembled to pay a religious regard to the public offices of piety, may it please God to enable you, with an engaged seriousness, to attend to what may now be offered to lead you, so far as I am able, into an intelligible, though inadequate idea of the truth meant, when it is said of God, in my text, that *the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, much less any house built with hands*; and to shew you that this is a real truth. I shall be as brief as possible upon these points, that I may have time and strength to enlarge upon such reflections as are important in themselves, and may be seasonable for us to consider and improve under present circumstances.

ACCORDING to this method I would begin with saying, that, when God is represented as not contained in the heaven of heavens, much less in any house built with hands, his OMNIPRESENCE is the truth intended to be conveyed. It would be a wrong sentiment of God, should we conceive of him as confined to heaven, or earth, or any particular place in these worlds; for he is, if I may so speak, diffused all over heaven and earth, yea, all parts of the universe; insomuch, that he is no where excluded, but as truly present in every place, as in any place at all. It may seem to us, as though the space that is occupied by created bodies and spirits would exclude the presence of God, at least from these parts of space. But this is owing to our ignorance of God, our incapacity of conceiving justly of the MANNER in which he

he exists. He exists in all other existencies. His presence pervades their very *ESSENCE*. There is no such thing as possessing existence where God is not present ; there is no going where he is not. To this purpose is that beautifully striking language of the inspired David, in the 139th Psalm, *Whither shall I go from thy spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there : if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there : if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shalt thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darknes shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me ; yea, the darknes bideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day : the darknes and the light are both alike to thee.*" The presence of God knows no bounds. It is not limited to this or any of the other worlds that constitute the universe. Those, we have abundant reason to believe, are vastly numerous, as well as large, taking up an inconceivable extent of space. But we may not think, that they are the boundaries or limits of the Deity's presence. He not only fills these worlds, and every place in them, but that whole extra mundane space in which almighty power might still be displayed in making new worlds beyond the utmost stretch of the imagination of men or angels.

THE scriptures, it is true, speak of God as *dwelling in heaven, and coming down from heaven to earth*. It represents him as having had his residence in the *tabernacle* erected by Moses ; and as leaving that, and taking up his *abode* in the *temple* that was built by Solomon. But these are figurative

rative modes of expression, not intended to lead us into an apprehension, as though God was not at all times equally present, in regard of his existence, in all places whatsoever; but to give us to understand that *heaven* is the place where he most constantly and gloriously makes it appear that he is present; and that the *tabernacle* of Moses, and the *temple* of Solomon, were for a while, and during the pleasure of God, the places from whence he saw fit to make manifest his presence by communications of mercy or judgement. He was as truly present in all other places of the earth, as in this tabernacle and temple; though not to the same purposes of manifestation. And he is now, and has all along been, as really present on earth, and in every part of it, as in heaven itself; though heaven is the place where he makes it apparent, in the highest and noblest sense, that he is present: and he is accordingly said, after the manner of speaking among men, to *be* there, to have *his throne* there, and to *live and dwell* there. The plain truth is, notwithstanding the modes of speech which have been mentioned, which, though figurative, and borrowed from comparatively low similitudes, are well adapted to human weakness; I say, that notwithstanding these modes of speaking, we must conceive of God as absolutely unconfined in the extent of his existence, as being at once present throughout the universe, and beyond it, in all places, and in all space, without bounds and limits. And reason concurs with revelation in leading us into this idea of God.

WE are assured, from the regular exercise of our reasonable powers, that the God we believe in,

in, and worship, is an infinitely perfect being; and if he is infinitely perfect, he must be unlimited in the extent of his existence. These ideas are inseparably connected with each other. We find, by experience, that we, who are the highest order of beings in this lower world, are confined in our existence within a narrow sphere, not being able to be present but in one place at the same time, and being equally unable to move from this place to that but within certain limits, and in certain periods of time: and from hence we certainly know, because we feel it to be true, that we possess existence in an imperfect degree only, as it is thus bounded in its extent: and from hence also we can readily perceive, that, by enlarging the extent of existence in our imaginations, we shall have an idea of it as still more perfect; and by enlarging it to the utmost of our capacity, and then, supposing it still capable of enlargement beyond all bounds, we come as near as our intellectual powers will permit, to existence that is infinitely perfect. And such existence must be attributed to God. He must be supposed to fill heaven and earth, all worlds, all things, all place, all space with his boundless and unlimited presence; or his existence will be less perfect than it might be, that is, he will not be an absolutely perfect being, or, in other words, he will not be God. The arguing, from natural reason, is equally strong in proof of all the perfections of God. As he is a self-existent Being, without beginning to be, or deriving what he is from any other, there is the same reason to ascribe to him one perfection as another, and every perfection without limitation in degree. There is therefore, upon the foot of reason, as

B

good

good grounds to think, that he possesses absolutely extensive existence, as that he possesses it at all. For what is there that should limit his existence, confining it within these or those bounds? We know of nothing, we can conceive of nothing; but are unavoidably led to think, from his having existence at all, that he is not confined within any supposable bounds, but is universally diffused, filling all worlds, all things, and all space.

BUT the omnipresence of God is the doctrine of revelation, as well as of reason. The sacred books that contain the revelations of God, it is true, do not enter upon a philosophical consideration of any of the divine attributes; but treat of them principally in a way that is adapted to answer the ends of piety. And thus it speaks of the "presence" of God; not concerning itself so much about its strict philosophic notion, as to lead us into such sentiments with reference to its extent, as may be of most use to the purposes of religion. And it sufficiently gives us to understand, that it is amazingly extensive, not being confined to heaven, but diffusing itself so as to fill both heaven and earth. The language of the bible is emphatically strong to this purpose. Says the prophet Jeremiah, personating the great God himself by commission from him, *Do not I fill heaven, and earth?* The inspired David, in the 139th Psalm, very strongly, as well as beautifully describes the blessed God, as "present every where, in heaven, in hell, in the uttermost parts of the sea;" yea, as "possessing our very reins." And the great apostle of the Gentiles, in making known the one true and living God, to the idolatrous

lacious people at Athens, describes him to them, Acts xvii. 27, 28. *Not as far from every one of us ; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

It may not be unworthy of notice here, that the omniscience and omnipresence of God involve each other ; at least, they are so nearly and closely connected, that we cannot easily, if at all, conceive of the one without the other. Perhaps, they are inseparable. It may be, God could not be omniscient, if he was not omnipresent. Now, the scripture is full and express in declaring the omniscience of God, which is a constructive proof of his omnipresence also. He is represented as *knowing all things*, whether past, present, or to come. He is said to be well acquainted with *even the hearts of all the children of men*, the devices, imaginations, purposes, and most secret working ; yea, we are assured, that "*nothing is hid from his allseeing eye*," and that he has a most clear, perfect, and certain knowledge of all things, not excepting the volitions, and determinations, of free intelligent agents, however, they may be secreted from all other beings whatever. The inspired David, with equal propriety and elegance, expresses himself upon this matter, in the 139th Psalm, *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me, thou knowest my down sitting, and mine up rising, thou understandest my thoughts as far off, Thou compassedst my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo ! O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.* It is obvious to perceive, that, in these words of the holy prophet, there

there is a connection between the knowledge and presence of God. This is observably conspicuous in the 3d verse, *Thou compasses my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.* And it should seem as though he had it in direct view to ground the omniscience of God, of which he had been speaking, upon his omnipresence, for he goes on, in the following verse to tell us, there was no going from his presence ; for he existed in heaven, in hell, on earth, and even in the hearts of men. A most marvellous truth this ; but yet, a most certain one, as we have seen both from reason and revelation.

I now proceed to what I had principally in view in the choice of this subject, to make the proper reflections which are deducible from it. And,

I. If God is present every where, then he is equally the object of adoration and worship in all parts of the earth, and may reasonably be prayed to in this, or that, or the other place, either on the sea, or the dry land. For, being omnipresent, we can be in no place where his ear will not be open to our cry : and he can as well hear, and answer our requests in one place as another.

It is true, should God be pleased to specify any one place in distinction from another, as the place where he would be applied to, and from whence he would make the manifestations of his presence in the bestowment of favours ; it would now be fit and reasonable he should be worshiped in this place in preference to, and distinction from, every other.

other. And thus it was, respecting the Jews of old. The tabernacle, in the days of Moses, and for several ages, was the special place, where God had declared he would be present to the purposes of manifesting himself in blessings to his people. In this place therefore, rather than any other, and in distinction from every other, it was their duty, as a nation, to pay their religious homage to him. The Divine presence, as to its manifestation, was removed, in the days of Solomon from the tabernacle to the temple at Jerusalem. This became now the habitation of God, the place from whence he commanded the blessing : and to this place it was that the tribes of Israel were obliged to come, from all parts of Canaan, to offer sacrifice, and pay religious honour to the Deity. But the gospel of Christ makes no difference between one place and another. The time has long since come, when the command to worship him at Jerusalem, or in any one place in distinction from another, is no more in force ; but we may pay homage to our Maker in any place whatever. It is of no importance where this is done : only, we must “ worship God in spirit, and in truth.” Men may, under the influence of superstition, or to serve their worldly ends, consecrate certain spots of ground, and the buildings erected on them ; calling them holy, as being, after their consecration, the habitations of God, the places where he is more peculiarly present than in other places : but it ought to be seriously realized, that no priest, bishop, pope, or any power on earth, can confine the presence of the immense Being, as to any religious purpose, to any house built with hands ;

nor

nor are there any offices of divine worship, but may be as truly acceptable to God in any place, as in the best consecrated temple, provided they are performed "with clean hands and a pure heart."

It is observable, we read, in the sacred books, that our Saviour sometimes preached from the side of a fishing vessel, to those who stood on the shore ; sometimes from the declining part of a mountain ; sometimes in the wildernets ; sometimes in a private house ; and sometimes in the open field : and he much oftener carried on the worship of God, with his disciples and followers, in such places as these, than in the Jewish synagogues, or even the temple itself ; which surely he never would have done, if his gospel had not taken away all distinction between one place and another ; insomuch, that where ever any meet together in his name, and to worship the father through his mediation, they may be sure of being accepted, if they *lift up holy hands with a pure heart.*

Not but that it is highly fit houses should be erected for public worship ; for worshipping God, in a public manner, is both a *moral* and *instituted* duty ; and being so, houses must be built for this purpose ; otherwise people could not come together, at stated times, to join as one in paying homage to their Maker.

It was under the influence of these sentiments, that the fathers of this church, in ancient times, built the first church for public worship in this town. It stood at a small distance from the south-east.

east corner of the present State House. Here they met for public worship about nine or ten years. A larger and more commodious house was then built in the place where we now worship. The first sermon preached in it was on August the 23d, 1640. If we reckon from this date, that house was made use of for the public services of religion *seventy one years*, when it was reduced to ashes by the most extensively desolating fire that was ever known in Boston. By the best accounts I have been able to get, about one *hundred and ten families* were forced out of their dwelling places, some of which suffered much in their worldly interest, others were deprived of all they had. A number of persons also lost their lives, either by blowing up of houses, or by venturing too far to quench the flames, or rescue endangered goods from destruction. Awfully distressing indeed was this night, as also was the face of our desolate places the next day. I was myself, when a little boy, a spectator of the devouring flames, and the desolation occasioned by them. God grant we may never see again such an awful fire. It was not judged convenient to rebuild with wood; and the winter coming on, when brick work could not be well engaged in, it was deferred till the spring, to which it was owing that *about one year and seven months* were completed before we could meet together in an house of our own to worship our maker. The first sermon preached in this then new house was on May the 3d. 1713. Through the kind providence of him who is *head over all for the good of the church*, no bad accidents, no evil occurrences, have wholly hindered our worshipping God in this house, till, by the decays *naturally arising*

arising from a course of years, it became necessary it should be repaired. This has been done, thanks be to God, with remarkable harmony among yourselves, and safety to those who have been your workmen. Permit me to rejoice with you on this account, as also, that, while your house was repairing, brotherly love so pleasingly and conspicuously subsisted between you, and the Sister Church with whom you united in your attendance on gospel institutions, and that we parted, not with divided hearts, but in the exercise of that mutual love which becometh the disciples of Jesus.

I CONGRATULATE you, my brethren in Christ, not in a way of ceremonial compliment, but with that sincerity which is always proper, when a Gospel Minister is speaking from the sacred desk ; I congratulate you upon your having repaired this house, adapting it with decency and convenience to the purpose of your meeting together to pay homage to the supreme Governour of the world. I doubt not you entered into *God's courts* this morning with praise, making your supplications to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in some such language as that of the 24th Psalm, uttered upon the Ark's being fixed in the temple of old, built by the special direction of heaven, *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be lifted up ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in.* You will not imagine, that the God of glory will come down to dwell in this house, as he dwelt in the tabernacle built by Moses, or in the temple built afterwards by Solomon : But he may, and will, if it be not your own fault, dwell in it in a far higher and better

better manner, in the spiritual sense ; that is, to the purposes of such graces as shall prepare you for admission into his temple, in the Jerusalem that is above, where you shall give glory to God, and the Lamb in all perfection, and so as that you shall be uninterruptably happy forever.

THE house you have repaired, and in which you begin this morning to pay homage to the Deity, is, as to external appearance, more convenient and beautiful, than in its former state. May the *spiritual glory* of this latter house be greater than that of the former. The first house, I have reason to believe, had often the glory of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, manifested in it, by the conversion of sinners, and edification of saints in faith, comfort and holiness, until they were crowned with eternal life. May this glory of the Lord be more universally and conspicuously displayed in this latter house, under the ministrations of your present pastors, and all succeeding ones, that it may be said of multitudes that they were born here, in the spiritual sense, that they were nurtured here, and carried on from babes in Christ, until they attained to the stature of men, and were formed to a metenefs for heavenly glory.

NEARLY sixty years, are now compleated, my beloved brethren, since I have been with you in the service of the Gospel ; and my labours, I trust, have not been wholly in vain, notwithstanding my manifold infirmities and imperfections. Need I an epistle of commendation from you ? Ye are yourselves, some of you, I have abundant reason to believe, my epistle, yea rather the epistle
C of

of Christ, through a divine influence, accompanying my ministrations, however unworthy, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. Such trust have I through Christ, Godward. And it is my joy now, and may it be my crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming!

I AM now grown old, and unable, through manifold infirmities, to go on with the work of the sacred ministry. Thanks be to God you have my son in the gospel to supply my place, and he will do it much to your advantage, as he is now in the prime of life, and singularly qualified to serve the interest of Christ among you. I am decreased, and shall decrease still more and more, but he will increase: God grant it may be in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that he may be more and more furnished for a master-workman in the kingdom of Christ. God Almighty bless him, and make him, and long continue him, a rich blessing to you and yours; and may he be improved by heaven, as an instrument of turning many to righteousness, that he may shine as a star of the first magnitude, in the firmament of heaven, forever and ever.

I SHALL now conclude with a few words of advice, which you may look upon as the last and dying words of your aged pastor from this desk, as he does not expect to be much longer with you; and my beloved son in Christ, will I doubt not, join with me in recommending them to you.

IN

IN the first place : As that day, which, from the Apostle John, and in his stile, we call the *Lord's day*, is eminently *the day* on which it is your duty to appear in the courts of the Lord's house, be advised to make it your delight to rejoice at its approach, and not to suffer it to be a weariness to you. Be glad at every return of this appointed season to glorify God in the house of his glory. This was the temper of holy David, and must, in a good degree, be your's, or you will not carry in your breasts, one of the strongest proofs, that you are possessed of that real piety, without which you cannot, upon a solid foundation, hope for the salvation of God. Distinguish yourselves from those multitudes, in this degenerate age, who are made uneasy upon seeing the light of this day of God, and feel impatient until it is passed and gone ; and set before their view such an example of pious regard to the Lord's day, as may happily tend to excite in them a care of imitation.

• Be advised also to be steady and constant in waiting upon God in *the place where his honour dwells*. It is amazing condescension in the Majesty of heaven, that he will permit such worms of the dust as we are, to appear in any house we may build to meet in to worship him. He humbles himself to take notice of the adoration of angels : and yet he readily bows the heavens, and comes down, that he may fill his houses for worship with his glory. Will you not then rejoice at opportunities of appearing in this house, where you may hope he will manifest his glory ? You cannot, in any way, do greater honour to yourselves,

yourselfes, or put yourselfes under greater advantages in order to your obtaining the blessing, even live forever more. Do not suffer yourselfes to be needlessly absent from the house of God, but attend there in a steady, uniform course, on the institutions of divine worship. Content not yourselfes with joining in prayer, and in hearing the preached word ; but pay all due honour to the ordinance of the supper. In obedience to the command of God's King in Zion, neglect not to eat bread, and drink wine, in remembrance of him who died for your sins, that, by making atonement for them, he might open a way for the display of God's mercy in their pardon. Breaking bread at the table of Christ, is a plain, expresse part of gospel worship, and as proper and suitable an one as any that has been appointed to be attended on in his house, and as necessary an one, in point of obligation, to be regarded by all who call themselves the disciples of Christ. Let those among you who have hitherto been unmindful of their duty, in this special instance, be humbled in a sense of their past neglect, and at length be persuaded to come into the steady continued practice of it, that the attendants at the gospel supper may be numerous, more so in the latter house than in the former.

Be advised again to come seasonably to this house of worship, from sabbath to sabbath, so as that no part of the publick devotion of the sanctuary may be carried on without your joining in it. You are so situated, in common with the other christian societies in this town, that you may, with ease, if it be not your own fault,
assemble

assemble together so nearly at the same time, as that you may all unite as one in every exercise of publick piety towards God. And it is pity, that any, through carelessness, or any worse cause, should come so late to God's house, as to lose the opportunity of bearing their part in beginning the worship of God, whether by prayer, reading his holy word, or singing to his praise. Too common a fault this, in all our churches, and it were to be wished it might be generally amended.

Be advised yet further to take all due care, that the services of God's house be performed in a becoming manner. In order whereto, your outward behaviour should be grave, serious, and not, in any measure, expressive of levity, carelessness, and indifferency, with respect to those exercises of piety, you meet together to unite in. I am not going to point out to you any particular gestures of body, whether kneeling, or standing, or sitting, as most decent; nor to speak of any one gesture as suited to one part of worship, and another as better to another. I shall leave this to those who are fond of ceremonial nicety, and imagine God is so too. All I aim at saying is only this in general, that you should maintain a care of appearing outwardly decent and reverent in the time of worship; restraining yourselves from any thing, either in look, gesture, or behaviour that is light, or vain, or in any respect unbecoming the presence you are in, or the solemn duties you are to perform.

BUT it is not enough that you behave in God's house with external decency; but there must be also the inward reverence of your hearts, in all the
acts

acts of divine worship you engage in. Remember, there may be the former where there is not the latter. Your deportment in the house of the Lord may be visibly serious and devout, while yet your thoughts may be vainly wandering to the ends of the earth. You may come, and sit before God in his house, and all the while your hearts may be going after covetousness, pride, sensuality, or some lust or other. It is not therefore enough, that you are externally decent in the time of worship, but you should revere and honour the God you adore, in your hearts; bearing it in mind, that he is a spirit, and will be pleased with no worship but that which is performed in spirit, and in truth. Whenever, therefore, you come to God's house to attend on the institutions of piety, look well to your inward frame of mind, and be above all things careful, that you yield to God the love of your hearts, and serve him with true gospel sincerity. For God looketh not at the outward appearance, but the heart; and will not therefore esteem himself *sanctified by those who come nigh him*, unless they serve him with reverence and godly fear. The upright in their worship are those *only his countenance will behold with delight.*

FINALLY, be advised to exhibit and maintain a consistent character; not imagining that your *whole duty* lies in *sanctuary devotion*, or that this will atone for the sins of your lives. It is a sure truth, and you should impress it on your minds as such, that you will only trifle with God in the services of his house, if, when you go from it, you behave as *men of the world, whose only portion is here.* The whole tenor of your conversation should correspond.

to the sacred exercises of *the place where his honour dwells*. You should make it appear to all you converse with, that the love of God reigns in your hearts. And from love to him, and a principle of unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ, a vein of true christian piety and goodness should run through your whole conduct in life. Holiness to the Lord should be inscribed on all your employments and enjoyments. Whether you eat or drink, whether you buy or sell, or whatever you do, you should do all to the glory of God, and in the name of Christ : so may you hope, and upon just and solid grounds, that your sacrifices of prayer and praise, and all your acts of devotion, whether they are offered to God from your closet, families, or his house of worship, will be acceptable to him ; and that, from worshipping and serving him here on earth, you shall, in proper season, have entrance granted to you into the temple of God above, where you shall join, with that innumerable company which have been selected from the rest of mankind, in all ages, in singing—
HALLALUJAHs, TO HIM THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB, FOR EVER AND EVER. A M E N.

F I N I S.

7 AP 64

